

REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE

Washington Connection Benefit Portal

RCW 74.04.225

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Economic Services Administration
Office of the Assistant Secretary
PO Box 45070
Olympia, WA 98504-5070
(360) 725-4676

<https://www.washingtonconnection.org>

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TTY/VCO users may also call Washington Relay Service by dialing 711.

Executive Summary: Washington Connection Benefit Portal

This is the sixth annual report in fulfillment of [RCW 74.04.225](#) for FY 2016. The 2010 Washington State Legislature enacted legislation – Engrossed Second Substitute House Bill 2782, to strengthen existing efforts of state agencies and partners to implement an online benefit portal. The goal was to streamline and expand online public access to a broad array of state, federal and local services and benefits.

Successfully implemented in December 2010 and enhanced quarterly thereafter, the [Washington Connection](#) benefit portal received national recognition through the 2012 Bright Ideas Award from the Ash Center at Harvard’s John F. Kennedy School of Government.

Evidence shows that an integrated approach is not only more efficient for administration of service applications and renewals, but it critically offers individuals and families in need more streamlined access to multiple benefits that could prevent further crises.

As of July 2016, over 145,000 households have used their Washington Connection Client Benefit Accounts to renew their benefits or update information online, which is an increase of 42% since July 2015 (*See Figure 1*). Continuous marketing and outreach are critical to the increase of online usage of Washington Connection.

Background

As required by the Legislature, the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) deployed an integrated approach in providing online access to services and benefits as well as employment, training and education programs. Through strong partnerships with government agencies, community partners, community colleges, and non-profit organizations, Washington Connection continues to fulfill this requirement.

Washington Connection shares information about a wide variety of benefits and services, offers customers the option to apply for or renew services online (*See Figure 2*), and provides a pre-screening process with referral links for additional services for which the applicant might be eligible (*See Figure 3*). These features were designed to remove barriers for families and individuals when they seek assistance to meet their basic needs.

Community Partnerships

Washington Connection provides tools and resources for community partners that can help their customers apply for and renew benefits online. These tools include the secure Partner Account, the “Client Search” feature, and online partner registration. Resources include online tutorials, training webinars, marketing materials, newsletters, and consultations. Currently there are approximately 900 registered partners throughout the state, working to improve local residents’ access to services and benefits (*See Figure 4*).

Governance

The Acting Secretary of the Department of Social and Health Services (DSHS) serves as the executive sponsor of the Washington Connection Advisory Committee comprised of representatives from community-based organizations, state agencies, tribes, higher education, and the Health Benefit Exchange (*See Figure 5*). While the Advisory Committee guides the direction of Washington Connection’s long-term goals and objectives, DSHS is responsible for daily operations of the portal, functionality enhancement, partnership development, public outreach, and data analysis.

Strategic Plan

The Advisory Committee approved the 2016-2018 Washington Connection Strategic Plan in January 2016 after extensive collaboration in previous months (*See Figure 6*). The Committee receives updates on new initiatives related to these four strategic goals: (1) increase online access to a wide range of services and benefits; (2) improve functionality and usability for online users; (3) expand community partnerships; and (4) strengthen support for community partners.

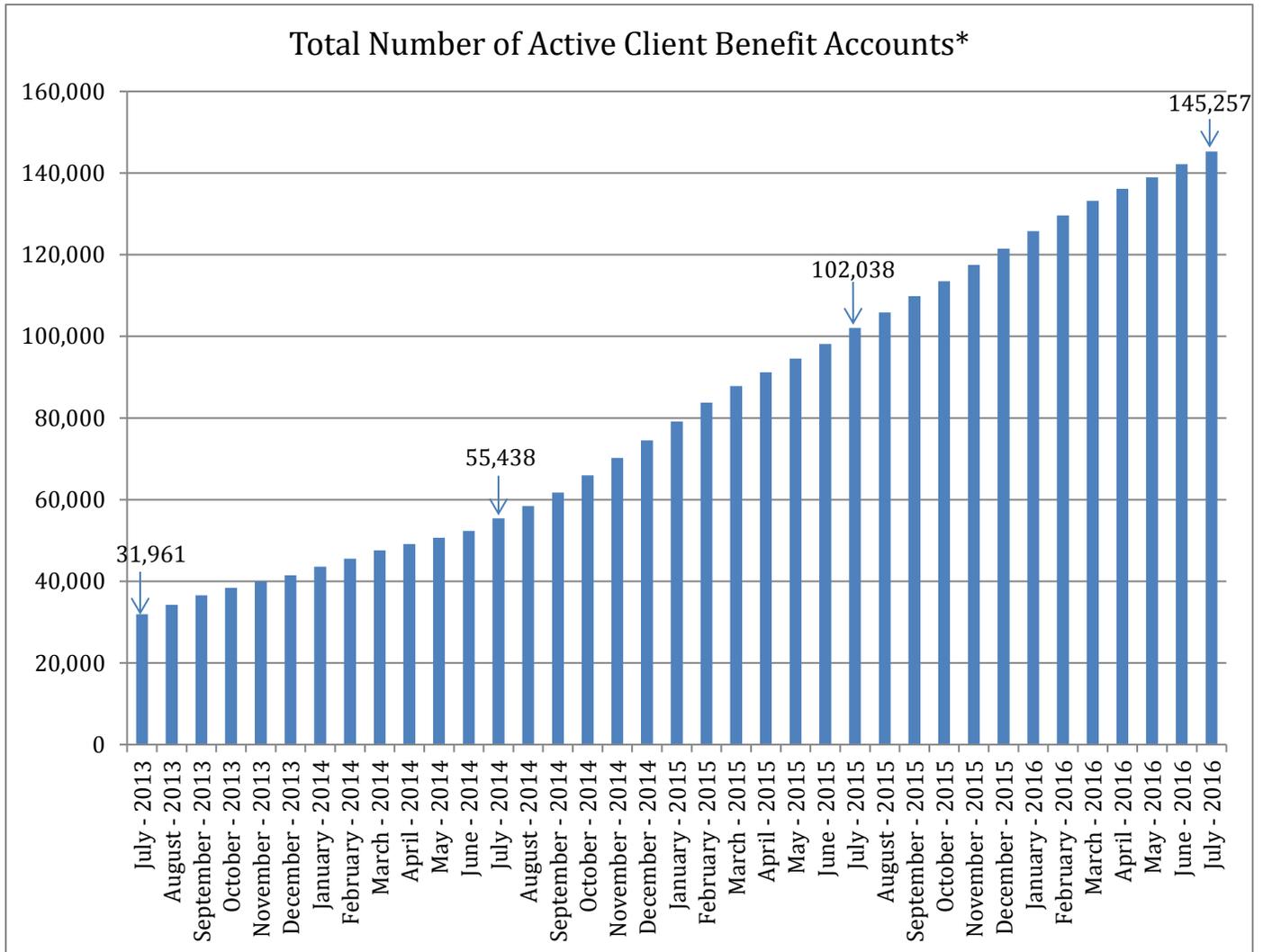
Figures

Additional update information is available in the following figures:

1. Total Number of Active Client Benefit Accounts
2. Benefit Programs Available through Online Application
3. Referral Links Available through Pre-screening Process
4. Number of Community Partners by Organization Type
5. Advisory Committee Membership in 2016
6. 2016-2018 Washington Connection Strategic Plan

Figure 1: Total Number of Active Client Benefit Accounts

The number of active Client Benefit Accounts in the past three years continues to increase as more and more individuals and families are using this online feature to monitor their benefit history, renew services, or update information. The Client Benefit Account provides clients with streamlined access to continued services without interruption as long as the clients remain eligible.



Data Source: Washington Connection Benefit Portal and Cognos Data Report, as of July 31, 2016

* To access their Client Benefit Account, a client must be a Head of Household, have federally verified Social Security Number, and meet one of the following criteria: be active in an assistance unit, have a pending application, be suspended from an active assistance unit, be pending spenddown for a medical assistance unit, be closed within the last 60 days, or be denied within the last 60 days.

Figure 2: Benefit Programs Available through Online Application*

Food Assistance

(The worker determines programs for which the client is eligible.)

- Basic Food: Federally Funded Food Assistance
- State Funded Food Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants

Cash Assistance

(The worker determines programs for which the client is eligible.)

- Temporary Assistance for Needy Family
- Refugee Cash Assistance Program
- State Family Assistance Program for Legal Immigrants
- Aged, Blind or Disabled Cash Assistance Program
- Pregnant Women Assistance Program
- Diversion Cash Assistance Program
- Consolidated Emergency Assistance Program
- State Supplemental Payment Program

Medical Assistance

- Health Care Coverage – for individuals 65 or older, blind or disabled
- Medicare Savings Program
- Mental Health Services (for mentally ill prison inmates soon to be released)

Child Care Subsidy Programs

- Working Connections Child Care
- Seasonal Child Care

Long Term Care Medical Assistance

- In-Home Long Term Care Services
- Assisted Living Facility / Adult Family Home
- Nursing Home
- Hospice
- Healthcare for Workers with Disabilities

* The services listed above may appear on the pre-screening “Results” page if the applicant meets the criteria. The applicant may apply for these services online if selected.

Figure 3: Referral Links Available through Pre-screening Process

Food Assistance

- [Free and Reduced Price School Meals Program](#)
- [Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children](#)

Medical Assistance

- Washington Apple Health through [Washington Healthplanfinder](#)
- [Take Charge Family Planning Program](#)

Cash Assistance

- [Child Support Services](#)
- [Earned Income Tax Credit](#)

Services for Children

- [Early Childhood Education and Assistance Program or Head Start](#)
- [Assistance for Foster Youth](#)

Employment, Education and Training

- [Start Next Quarter Free Educational Planning Workshops](#)
- [Vocation Rehabilitation Assistance](#)
- [Federal Student Aid](#)

Veterans Benefits

- [Veterans Online Application](#)
- [My HealtheVet for Personal Health Record](#)

Tribal Services

- [Information on Tribal Government Services](#) for Tribal Members, such as TANF, Child Support, Foster Care or other programs

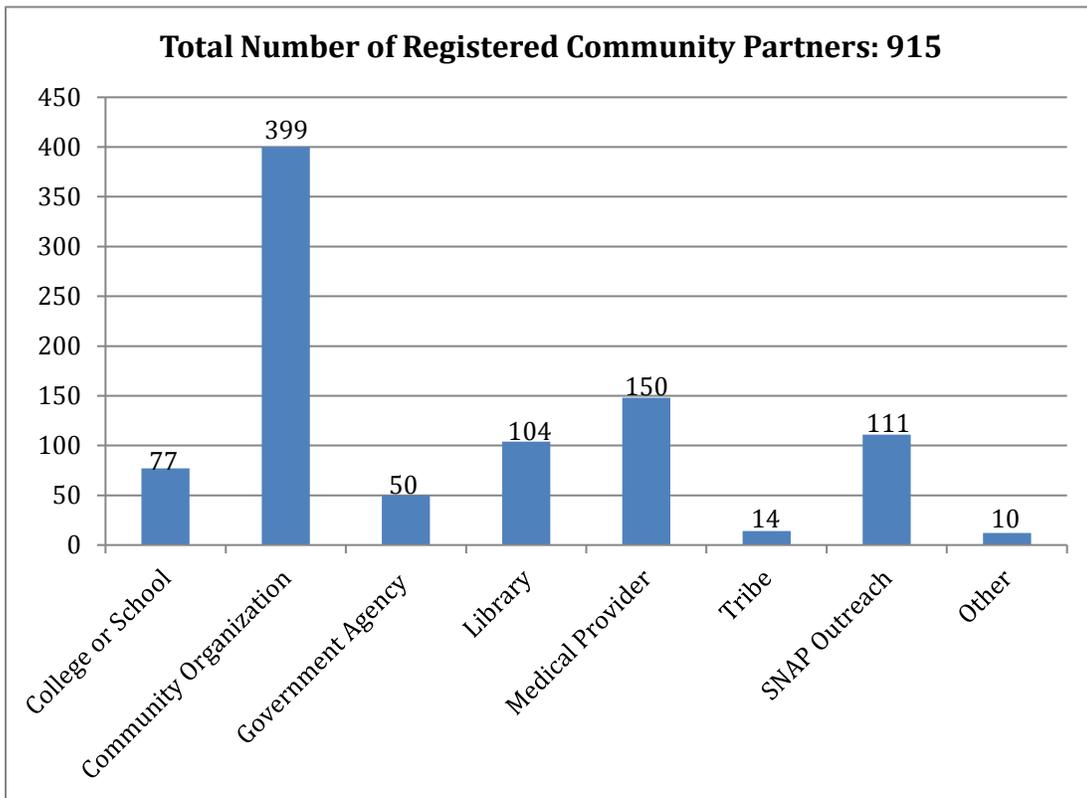
Housing and Utilities

- [Telephone Equipment for Deaf or Hard of Hearing](#)
- [Low Income Home Energy Assistance Program](#)
- [Housing Assistance](#)

Crime and Violence

- [Crime Victims Compensation Program](#)

Figure 4: Number of Community Partners by Organization Type



Number of Registered Community Partners by Organization Type by Region*

Region	College or School	Community Organization	Government Agency	Library	Medical Provider	Tribe	SNAP Outreach	Other	Total
Region 1	27	116	13	5	64	6	23	3	257
Region 2	14	185	22	51	60	2	49	6	389
Region 3	36	95	15	48	24	6	39	1	264
Other	0	3	0	0	2	0	0	0	5
Total	77	399	50	104	150	14	111	10	915

Data Source: Washington Connection Benefit Portal and Cognos Data Report, as of July 31, 2016

* Areas covered by each region:

Region 1: Counties in the Central and Eastern Washington

Region 2: Counties in the North Puget Sound area

Region 3: Counties in the Olympia Peninsula, South Puget Sound, and the Southwest Washington

Other: Counties outside the state border where partners also serve Washington residents

Figure 5: Advisory Committee Membership in 2016

Officers			
Officer Position	Name	Title	Organization
Executive Sponsor	Patricia Lashway	Acting Secretary	DSHS
Chair	David Stillman	Assistant Secretary	DSHS, Economic Services Administration
Co-Chair	John Bowers	Dean for Basic and Transitional Studies	South Seattle Community College
Vice Co-Chair	Monica Henry	Director	Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe, Social Services
Past Co-Chair	Robert Coit	Executive Director	Thurston County Food Bank
Committee Members			
Name	Title	Organization	
Jim Baumgart	Policy Advisor	Governor's Executive Policy Office	
Jesus Bervis	Eligibility Manager	NeighborCare Health	
Kelly Boston	Associate Director of Communications	Washington Health Benefit Exchange	
Ed Fox	Director	Port Gamble S'Klallam Tribe, Health Services	
Erin Frasier	Workforce Education Policy Associate	Washington State Board for Community & Technical Colleges	
Elizabeth Guerra	Community Services Director	Blue Mountain Action Council	
Liz Jaquette	Senior Manager of Programs	WithinReach	
Stacy Kellogg	Great Columbia 2-1-1 Director	People for People	
Lauren McGowan	Associate Director	United Way of King County, Ending Homelessness	
Ron Messmer	Funding Case Manager	Greater Lakes Mental Health	
Mary Schwartz	Data Systems Manager	Department of Commerce, Community Services and Housing	
Lisa Sohni	Outreach & Development Manager	Opportunity Council	
Kathy Thamm	Director	Community-Minded Enterprises	
Rudy Vasquez	Managed Care Operations Director	Sea Mar Community Health Centers	
Mary Wood	Assistant Director	Health Care Authority, Eligibility Policy & Services Delivery	

Figure 6: Washington Connection Strategic Plan

Goal 1: Increase online access to a wide range of services and benefits

Key Measure: Percent of online submittals*

Objectives	Strategies
A. Add more services to online application to increase awareness of resources available	➤ Add “Start Next Quarter” program to Washington Connection online application
B. Increase access to Medicaid from Washington Connection to decrease number of uninsured	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Add new Long-Term Support programs to online application ➤ Add “Crime Victims Compensation Program” to prescreening process ➤ Improve visibility of referral links to Washington Healthplanfinder
C. Add more referral links to prescreening and online application	➤ Identify opportunities to add more referral links as appropriate

Goal 2: Improve functionality and usability for online users

Key Measure: Percent of online submittals*

Objectives	Strategies
A. Make it easier for applicant to complete online application, eligibility renewal, and change report for multiple programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Implement prefilled eligibility renewal and change report for clients known by ACES system ➤ Implement auto renewals for non-MAGI medical coverage
B. Make it easier for applicants and partners to create their SAW account, Client Benefit Account, and Partner Account	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Enable WACON to receive SAW account update information from Washington Technology Solutions ➤ Link SAW process and partner registration to improve usability
C. Provide instant assistance to applicants by online Live Chat or telephone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Reach out to selected clients and help them create Client Benefit Accounts ➤ Assess available resources and capability to set up Live Chat function

* Online submittals include service applications, eligibility renewals, and change reports submitted through Washington Connection and Interactive Interviews.

Goal 3: Expand community partnerships

Key Measure: Percent of partnering Assisting Agencies that are actively submitting applications, eligibility renewals, or change reports for clients

Objectives	Strategies
A. Increase partnerships with Department of Corrections (DOC) and Community Corrections Agencies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Support the initiative to enable online application submissions by DOC for offenders before release ➤ Identify Community Corrections Agencies that are interested in becoming Washington Connection partners
B. Increase partnerships with Tribal organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Collaborate with Tribal organizations to develop partnerships and identify ways to remove barriers to services
C. Increase partnerships with agencies that serve elderly population	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Collaborate with agencies serving elderly to develop partnership and identify ways to remove barriers to services

Goal 4: Strengthen support for community partners

Key Measure: Percent of partnering Assisting Agencies that are actively submitting applications, eligibility renewals, or change reports for clients

Objectives	Strategies
A. Offer training in remote areas including training hosted by community partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Explore and identify locations and facilities in remote areas appropriate for providing training to community partners
B. Work with “Champion” agencies in underserved counties to increase awareness and partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Collaborate with regions to define and determine underserved areas; review Food and Nutrition Service report to identify gaps in outreach ➤ Identify current partners that can serve as “Champions” to reduce barriers to access for underserved populations
C. Improve current training structure and communication practices to better support community partners	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Create a process to engage partners periodically and support partnership sustainability ➤ Establish an ongoing communication plan

